

Building blocks of a psychological approach

'Paula', aged 15, has Leukaemia; her parents are divorced and argue constantly. Paula's 13-year-old sister has started to self-harm. Paula won't get out of the car at the hospital, refusing chemotherapy. The Oncologist wants to sedate her and is talking to legal services.

A referral is made to clinical psychology to assess the situation, provide a holistic formulation and make recommendations about interventions. A treatment package is designed which can both assist the treating team with their care plan and also support the family: to improve their communication and relationships, develop parenting strategies to keep the girls safe, provide positive coping strategies for managing procedural distress, and help Paula to explore her feelings and choices.

Assessment

A psychological assessment is based on our scientific knowledge about child development and the ways in which biological, psychological and social factors come together for an individual child or family. It will cover the child's: developmental history, social experiences with family and friends, significant life events, physical health, school experiences, social and economic family circumstances.

The views and ideas of the child and family/carers are crucial: their understanding of the difficulties, the meaning of their experiences to them from a personal and cultural perspective, goals and wishes of the family and young person.



No one has ever understood me before... I can see there are reasons why I feel the way I do and why I'm so afraid, I'm not crazy.
- Young person

Formulation

Formulation is a joint enterprise between the young person and/or family and the psychological practitioner. It summarises the information gathered at assessment, including possible biological factors, psychological factors and social factors. A good formulation combines all these factors to explain why problems may be happening, and begins to identify options for appropriate ways to help.

Formulation may include a diagnosis, of an autistic spectrum disorder for example, but is fundamentally a psychological understanding of the nature and causes of the difficulties. Formulation then points to an individual intervention or treatment plan..

Evaluation

Services need to use outcome measures and feedback tools, to ensure best practice and child/family satisfaction. It is best practice to revisit the formulation and intervention if it's not working.



Evidence Based Practice

Good evidence based practice is not a simple application of NICE recommended treatments based on simple diagnoses. Instead it:

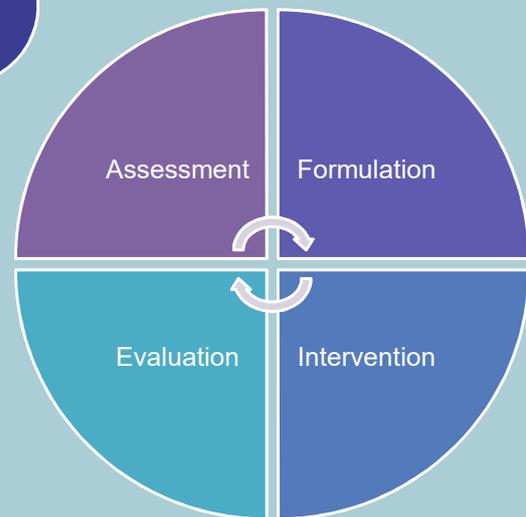
- combines the information derived from research
- fits with the family and their context
- monitors progress throughout an intervention using appropriate feedback and outcomes tools
- starts with a formulation that takes into account the problem and the context in which it presents, the cultural understanding of the difficulties, and the families' own goals, wishes and aspirations for treatment.

Personalised evidence based interventions for young people and families

The formulation may indicate that:

- a particular form of treatment is most appropriate, e.g. CBT
- more than one approach may be helpful, perhaps at the same time, for example CBT for the child alongside changes to education provision. This will require either multi-modally trained staff and/or a team approach within and across agencies
- there are more complex problems or difficulties in developing and sustaining the necessary relationships, so that highly qualified staff are needed to develop an individual care package involving all systems around the child to meet their whole needs

Psychological approaches may involve direct work with the child or family, provide consultation, support and supervision to those better placed to work with the family, and/or psychoeducation.



Because of the help I received from the clinical psychologists, my son is still at home and not in residential care.
- Parent

